



News Release

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Toxic chemicals prompt state to issue fish consumption advisories

Fish from Upper Columbia River and Pend Oreille River affected

OLYMPIA — Specific types of fish from the Upper Columbia and Pend Oreille rivers contain toxic chemicals according to analysis of two recent studies. Based on mercury and Polychlorinated Biphenyl (PCBs) contamination, the state Department of Health is advising people to avoid or limit certain types and amounts of fish they eat from the affected areas.

“Fish are a great source of protein and other essential nutrients,” says State Health Officer, Dr. Maxine Hayes. “These recommendations help people make smart choices so they can enjoy fish safely as an important part of a healthy diet.”

Fish contain high-quality protein and other essential nutrients, are low in saturated fat, and contain omega-3 fatty acids. A balanced diet that includes a variety of fish can contribute to heart health and children’s proper growth and development. Yet certain types of fish from these areas contain toxic chemicals, and eating too much raises health risks, especially for pregnant women and kids.

The risks from mercury and PCBs depend on the amount of fish eaten and the levels of the contaminants in the fish. The chemicals can’t be seen, smelled, or tasted in fish, but by following the new health advice, people can get the benefits of eating fish and reduce their exposure to the harmful effects of mercury and PCBs.

Pend Oreille River fish consumption recommendations

- Women who are or might become pregnant, nursing mothers, and young children:
 - Don’t eat northern pikeminnow.
 - Don’t eat northern pike bigger than 24 inches.
 - Limit northern pike smaller than 24 inches and smallmouth and largemouth bass to two meals per month.

— More —

The fish consumption advisory for the Pend Oreille River is based on mercury contamination in northern pike. Mercury is a natural element found in rocks and soil. Mercury spreads in the environment through industrial air pollution, mining operations, and improper disposal of products that contain mercury — including thermostats, electrical switches, and fluorescent light bulbs. If a developing fetus or infant is exposed to high levels of mercury, the child may have learning and behavioral difficulties later in life. Although adults are less sensitive, it's important that they also limit their exposure to mercury.

Upper Columbia and Lake Roosevelt fish consumption recommendations

- Women who are or might become pregnant, nursing mothers, and young children:
 - Don't eat northern pikeminnow.
 - Limit largemouth bass and largescale sucker to 2 meals a month.
 - Limit burbot, longnose sucker, mountain whitefish, smallmouth bass, and walleye to one meal a week.
- Women who don't plan to have children or those beyond childbearing age, and all men:
 - Limit largescale sucker to one meal per week due to PCBs.

The state health department's analysis adds new recommendations to an existing fish consumption advisory for the Upper Columbia River, which goes from Grand Coulee Dam to the Canada border and includes all of Lake Roosevelt. This advisory is for both mercury and PCB contamination. PCBs are a group of manmade chemicals once used widely in products like coolants and lubricants for electrical transformers. PCBs were banned in the 1970s because they stay in the environment for a long time and can cause health problems if a person is exposed to them in significant amounts. PCBs may cause cancer and can affect the immune and reproductive systems and the thyroid. A developing fetus or baby that is exposed to high levels of PCBs may develop learning and behavioral difficulties.

Learn more and find other [fish consumption advisories](http://doh.wa.gov/fish) (doh.wa.gov/fish) for Washington online. The state health department is evaluating additional fish samples to decide if other species should be added to the advisory. The [Department of Health website](http://doh.wa.gov) (doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).